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RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY 5285
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 7467
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 4221
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RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 7602
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RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 2424
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 3587
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RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000146

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XOX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

With actions that are described by some reports in Israel's newspapers as having sent conflicting messages, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu met yesterday with U.S. Special Envoy to the Middle East, George Mitchell, and spoke about his appreciation for

the U.S. efforts to renew the peace process, while later in the day he participated in tree-planting ceremonies in Gush Etzion and Maale Adumim and spoke about Israel's intention to remain in the settlement blocs. Netanyahu is quoted as saying yesterday in Kfar Etzion: "The message is clear... We are here and will remain here. The settlement blocs are part of Israel forever. This is acceptable to the great majority of Israel's citizens and is gradually being instilled in international consciousness." Sources in the Prime Minister's office said that the tree-planting was not an act of defiance towards the Americans. Palestinian spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh, conversely, said that Netanyahu's statements were undermining Mitchell's efforts to bring the sides back to the negotiating table.

Yediot Reported that Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon met yesterday with U.N. Envoy to Lebanon, Michael Williams, and said that Israel was following with concern the reports that Hezbollah was training and arming in Syria and Lebanon. The deputy foreign minister reportedly conveyed a warning to the Lebanese government, saying that Israel would hold Lebanon responsible for any rocket attacks from its territory against Israel. The U.N. envoy, for his part, protested the ongoing Israeli Air Force flights over Lebanese skies, which he called a violation of Security Council Resolution 1701.

In an unrelated story, Yediot and Israel Hayom reported that Deputy Foreign Minister Ayalon met with Belgian Development Cooperation Minister, Charles Michel, to inform him that he could not visit the Gaza Strip, so as not to give legitimacy to the Hamas regime. A debate ensued between the two, in which the Belgian minister said that he wanted to examine the situation in Gaza for the purpose of extending humanitarian aid. Ayalon, for his part, said that Israel was consistent in denying entry to the Gaza Strip and had barred various European foreign ministers from doing so in the recent past.

All newspapers reported Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Shimon Peres are scheduled to travel to Europe to mark International Holocaust Remembrance Day - Netanyahu to Poland and Peres to Berlin.

The prime minister will meet with the Polish president and prime minister and participate in a ceremony at Auschwitz. The president is slated to speak in Hebrew at the Bundestag.

Block Quotes:

Mideast:

I. "One Year, Ten Mistakes: President Obama"

Former Meretz leader, former Justice Minister, and chief Israeli promoter of the Geneva Initiative, Yossi Beilin, wrote in the independent Israel Hayom (1/25): "These are Obama's [ten] mistakes [in his first year in office]: He did not read the literature published following the failure of the Camp David summit, and did not make a correct assessment of the ways to renew negotiations. He appointed George Mitchell to a post that was too big for him. After (saying) that peace was an American interest, he returned to the mantra that he cannot want peace more than the Israelis and the Palestinians. He turned the demand to freeze settlements into a condition for renewing (talks). He wasted unnecessary months on defining the freeze, and did not understand that 100 days of grace are only given once. He did not insist on the condition he posed, (exposing) the administration's lack of professionalism. He did not hurry to dissociate himself from the statement of Secretary Clinton that the freeze was an unparalleled precedent in Israel's governments. He insisted on summoning the sides to a summit in New York last September, (exacerbating) the feeling that it was impossible to return to the negotiating track, and deepened the disappointment in the region. He demanded that Abbas withdraw the Palestinian demand to discuss the Goldstone report, and failed to understand that agreeing to his demand would render the Palestinian leader unable to lead his people. He spoke about the excessive expectations in a journalistic interview, but he forgot that he is the US president, and is scrutinized by billions and every word of

his is weighed and has an effect. This way, at the end of a wasted year and without any bad intentions, his statements inflicted another blow on the chances of promoting something in our region."

I. "Obama chasing rainbows with two-state solution"

Former Ambassador to the U.S., former Minister of Foreign Affairs, and former Minister of Defense Moshe Arens wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (1/25): "U.S. President Barack Obama confided to Time magazine (that) he is clearly disappointed, but insists he will continue to work on a two-state solution.... During this past year, Obama has learned... that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an intractable problem... even when the president weighs in with full force.... It is hard to be optimistic regarding the continuing U.S. efforts in this matter, since the president seems to have his mind set on the two-state solution.... Abbas... is in no position to implement any such agreement he might sign.... And who will tell Obama that in seeking a two-state solution, he is chasing the rainbow? ... That the two-state solution, at least for now, is an impossible dream? It is not going to be any of his advisers, who urged him to demand a total freeze on building in [the West Bank and E. Jerusalem] - making it possible for Abbas to stall on any negotiations with Israel.... Netanyahu has evidently decided to play along, rather than confront Obama with alternate ideas. What might these ideas be? The grain of an idea appeared the other day when Abbas suggested that the United States negotiate with Israel in his place. That won't lead anywhere. But how about Jordan negotiating in Abbas' stead? That would return some symmetry to the intractable problem and correct the present asymmetry that continues to haunt the situation."

II. "Save the peace"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (1/25): "The diplomatic stalemate and the provocations by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government in East Jerusalem harm not only the chance for peace in the future but also past fruits of peace. Fifteen years after the peace (with) Jordan was signed, the two countries are now deep in a crisis the government is doing nothing to resolve. There is almost a complete lack of communication between Netanyahu and King Abdullah II. The Jordanians are boycotting FM Lieberman and hold few meetings with Israeli officials. Joint economic projects...are also on hold. Jordan is concerned ... about increased Israeli pressure on the Palestinians in the West Bank, which could undermine internal stability in the Hashemite Kingdom. Abdullah is worried about the absence of talks between Israel and the Palestinians as well as Israeli activities aimed at increasing the number of Jews living in East Jerusalem. The Jordanians do not trust Netanyahu. As opposed to Turkey, Jordan prefers to handle the crisis discretely. Sacrificing these ties (with Jordan) for the sake of the Netanyahu government's harmful actions in East Jerusalem demonstrates a severe deficiency in the management of foreign and security policy. The prime minister must realize the diplomatic price Israel is paying for his attempts to placate the right. His bureau's comment - that Netanyahu would be happy to meet with the king "whenever the need arises" - shows dangerous indifference in light of the erosion of Israel's status in the region, and gratuitous arrogance toward a country whose friendship is essential."

CUNNINGHAM